Tobacco – Third World Charges Lack Credence

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you have a question about tobacco, write us.

Question: Critics of the tobacco industry sometimes claim that the large tobacco companies are forcing their products onto developing nations. Are these companies exploiting the Third World?

Answer: No cigarette manufacturer – here or abroad – has ever forced anyone, anywhere in the world to use its products.

To smoke or not to smoke, and what to smoke, has always been and should be an individual decision based on free choice. Equally important is the fact that tobacco has been and continues universally to be a legally sold product.

Critics of tobacco claim that the Western cigarette manufacturers are creating a market of new tobacco smokers in the untapped Third World.

What these commentators forget is that tobacco is known and enjoyed in all nations. Cigarettes are manufactured in at least 75 percent of all countries in the world. Some of the transnational tobacco companies have been in business in host nations for from 20 to 70 years.

"If there is a measured increase in cigarette smoking" in Third World nations, "it is probably because greater affluence permits more widespread purchasing of manufactured cigarettes and less use of homemade smoking materials," a Tobacco Institute spokesman recently told the Los Angeles Times.

Tobacco grown in emerging nations for sale abroad or use by manufacturers locally becomes a key cash crop for its farmers, helping to keep them on the farm, where they grow food crops as well.

Advertising Campaigns

Some charge that tobacco companies conduct aggressive Third World advertising campaigns. Where advertising restrictions exist in the countries in which they market cigarettes, tobacco companies observe them.

More importantly, though, it should be remembered that cigarette advertising is brand advertising, used to divide the already existing market by promoting loyalty. Ads do not say "Smoke cigarettes." Rather they urge people to "Smoke my brand" or "Switch from the brand you now smoke."

Rarely, in fact, do tobacco companies become involved in emerging nations in which there has not already developed a strong demand for tobacco products and, indeed, local tobacco product manufacturing.

Equally without foundation is the charge that these international companies use undue pressure on Third World media to quash anti-smoking articles. This is an extension of a charge sometimes made about the U. S. industry and it is untrue here and worldwide.

Q&A

Negative news reports on tobacco – unfortunately, often one-sided and rife with misinformation – are commonplace worldwide in print media, whether or not they carry cigarette advertising.

Tar, Nicotine Levels

It is sometimes claimed that tobacco companies sell in the developing countries cigarettes that contain higher levels of tar and nicotine than in developed countries.

Consumer preference, of course, determines the types of products sold in any market; cigarettes are no exception. Providing the kinds of products that consumers want is simply good business.

Wherever they sell cigarettes, the policy of transnational tobacco companies is to offer the smoker a range of brands and yields while recognizing preferences in particular marketing areas.

It should also be noted that after decades of scientific debate, there is still an unsolved controversy about the health significance, if any, of any level of tar, nicotine, and other components of cigarettes.

Tobacco's detractors also claim that international companies preach the economic benefits of the leaf to Third World countries.

The benefits of tobacco as a cash crop and export are numerous, and no cigarette company needs to point out the obvious. Leaders in emerging nations have learned of the value of tobacco from such prestigious and responsible international groups as the Food and Agriculture Organization, the U.N. Development Program, and the World Bank. These organizations have assisted with tobacco development projects in Ethiopia, Jordan, Uganda, Yemen, Tanzania, and Zambia.

Food Crop

Opponents have contended that tobacco cultivation robs hungry countries of agricultural labor and land that could grow food.

In fact, in the Third World countries land is generally abundant. Therefore, tobacco does not compete with food crops for growing space.

Experience has shown that tobacco can help the production of food crops grown in rotation with it. Where land has been planted with tobacco before another crop, yields of the latter can noticeably increase, according to a study published in 1980 by the Intelligence Unit of the London-based organization The Economist.

Many believe that more food is produced because of the presence of tobacco. One obvious reason is that tobacco farmers, earning a good profit, are more likely to stay on the land, growing food as well as leaf, than those who don't grow tobacco. In southern Brazil, tobacco has helped farmers pay for improvements including rural electrification and paved roads.

The international companies based in the U. S. annually give hundreds of thousands of dollars to state schools in developing nations for research on improved growing methods and leaf strains.

Contrary to opponents' claims, tobacco is far from being a "new product" anywhere. It is known to all cultures, whether they found the leaf on their own or were introduced to it by 16th and 17th century European explorers.

The Tobacco Institute recently held its 10th Tobacco College, a gathering to introduce new people in the industry to aspects of various tobacco controversies. This college had an international flavor, with among 50 "students" Dr. Jean-Pierre Lichti, managing director, Swiss Cigarette Manufacturer Association (left) and Brian G. Gapes, director, Tobacco Institute of Australia (right), joining Walker Merryman, a TI vice president and "dean" of the college.

Commentary

The Lexington (Ky.) Herald in an editorial (9/28) called measures being considered by Congress to "strengthen" the cigarette health warning "another example of excessive tinkering" and "unnecessary overkill." The Salem (Ore.) Statesman Journal (9/24) called the proposals a "loser." Also, the Meadville (Pa.) Tribune (9/22) said it doubted the proposed new health language would be effective.

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"Cigarettes are one product that U. S. officials believe could easily make a significant dent in Uncle Sam's enormous ($18 billion last year) trade deficit with Japan."

"'If American-made cigarettes were allowed to gain just 10 percent of the Japanese market,' argues Philip Morris International, one of the American makers, in a position paper, 'the imbalance in trade would be reduced by half a billion dollars.'"

The Wall Street Journal
News article
9/30/82

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"No precise conclusions regarding the effects, if any, of cigarette smoking on the incidence of lung cancer can as yet be drawn. This, of course, is a most unsatisfactory outcome for enthusiastic anti-smokers."

Philip R. J. Burch
Department of Medical Physics
University of Leeds, England
Writing in:
Medical Hypotheses
9/82

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"The worldwide tobacco industry is increasingly being seen as a 'cash cow' by governments seeking new tax revenues," Lester W. Pullen, president and chief executive officer of R. J. Reynolds Tobacco International, said on Oct. 7 in a speech in London.

Pullen said recent steep hikes in cigarette taxes have directly resulted in reduced sales in several major countries, including Great Britain, West Germany, and Brazil.

"Government leaders appealing for new taxes or tax reform like to use the term 'fair share.' I know of no country in the world where the argument can reasonably be made that the tobacco industry does not pay its fair share. In fact, for many years we have carried a heavily disproportionate share of the tax burden," Pullen said.

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"A cigar ought not to be smoked solely with the mouth, but with the hand, the eyes, and with the spirit. You do not fit a cigar into your schedule; you give it a moment and it occupies your time and enriches it."

Zino Davidoff
Author of The Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar
Quoted in the Dallas Morning News
9/13/82

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Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/qjgk0000